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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 003009

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TAGS: PGOV SF
SUBJECT: DA LEADER ZILLE EXPLAINS PARTY PHILOSOPHY

REF: A. PRETORIA 2817

1B. PRETORIA 1597

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Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DONALD TEITELBAUM. REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

11. (U) On August 14, Democratic Alliance (DA) Leader Helen Zille spoke about "The Future of the Democratic Alliance" as part of the US-funded Africa Dialogue Lecture Series at the University of Pretoria. Zille spoke at length to a crowd of about 75, almost all white men, about what the DA stands for: "an open opportunity society in which everyone has the right, space, and opportunity to be herself and pursue their goals and interests." The DA, she said, should be synonymous with the word "opportunity" and should focus on policies that allow people to become "agents of development for themselves and family." Instead, Zille lamented that most South Africans equate her party to "opposition, as if that is such a bad thing" and "liberalism with hard-hearted racial radicalism." She said that even Mbeki has criticized their credo for "atomizing individuals." (COMMENT: Liberalism in the South African context is most similar to libertarianism in U.S. politics. END COMMENT)

CLICHES SURROUND IRONY

12. (SBU) Zille also spoke about the DA's watchdog role in a healthy democracy, arguing that "humans are fallible; power tends to corrupt; a governing party does not equal the state; and holding a political majority doesn't mean you are right about everything." (COMMENT: By pointing out truisms like these, she did little to differentiate her party, which is in power in the municipality of Cape Town, with the ruling ANC, or even to explain how the DA would be better than the ANC if it held a political majority in the country. END COMMENT) She used the August 8 firing of Deputy Health Minister Madlala-Routledge (ref A) to justify the country's need for an opposition party. Zille commented that, "in the ANC, obedience takes precedence over one's conscience" and that Mbeki's excuse for firing Routledge for not being a team player was simply a "euphemism for not toeing the party line." However, Zille contradicted herself during the question and answer session when someone asked her for the party's view on stem cell research. She told the audience that she personally supports it, but that the issue has not been discussed by her party. She then said (without irony), "That's just my personal opinion, and everyone in the DA has the right to disagree with me until the party officially

takes a position."

MOVING TO STAND STILL

¶3. (U) After her speech, an audience member asked Zille to talk about the DA's strategy for the upcoming 2009 presidential election. Zille hesitated, and then said that she has asked her party to conduct some research, but that the simple answer was that the DA does not have one yet. She also admitted that it will be a real challenge to break their record of attracting 12 percent of the electorate, but that if the party does not try, South Africa will not have a democracy. Zille then ended the session by rhetorically asking everyone, "how do we offer real opportunity for all?" without offering any suggestions.

ZILLE'S NEW ROLE

¶4. (U) During the speech, Zille was asked how she manages to hold both the position of Cape Town mayor and DA Leader. She drily responded that she wonders why no one ever asks President Mbeki how he manages to be South Africa's President and ANC President, and chalked it up to "sexism." She then explained that she is judicious with her time, uses state of the art technology in the form of videoconferences and email, and works "almost non-stop" except for time she sets aside for her family, which is her number one priority.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) The DA is often praised for its watchdog role, but

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criticized just as often for being a party whose liberal philosophy does not resonate with most South Africans who were raised to value collective interests. Zille's speech also did little to quiet critics who accuse the DA of not offering practical alternatives. The day of the speech, however, Zille commented that she had only been in office as DA Leader for 100 days. Against a backdrop of internal bickering among liberals, like Zille herself, and conservatives from the old National Party (ref B), Zille's first task may be to instill a sense of unity in a divided party. However, without a strategy to attract new and younger members to replace those conservatives who could leave the party due to age or differing political philosophies, her attempts may do little to strengthen the party.

Teitelbaum